

Statement of Bevin Alexander

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Unconventional Threats and Capability

*On Terrorism and the New Age of Irregular Warfare*

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### Winning Future Wars

#### How Weapons that Never Miss Have Eliminated Conventional Warfare

The United States military must not find itself in the position that the French and British armies found themselves in 1940. In the campaign in the West, the Allied commanders were trying to fight the same sort of static war along a heavily defended, continuous front that they had conducted successfully in World War I. But Germany was fighting an entirely new kind of war that broke through these fronts with fast-moving panzer or armored divisions. These panzers drove deep into the Allied rear, dissolved the continuous front, and created chaos. In six weeks Germany shattered France and threw Britain off the Continent at Dunkirk. This German victory was achieved by only four German corps, 164,000 men, less than 8 percent of the German army. They brought about the complete rout of the better-equipped and much more heavily armed Allied armies totaling 3,300,000 men. At the critical point where the victory was won, Sedan, France, fewer than 60,000 of

these men were present. Thus, the actual victory was achieved by about 3 percent of the German army.

We face an equally decisive turning point in warfare today, and our military structure must change to accommodate it.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates alluded to this fact when he told the Association of the United States Army on October 10, 2007, that wars like those in Iraq and Afghanistan “would remain the mainstay of the contemporary battlefield for some time.” His message was a challenge *not* to treat the current conflicts as anomalies, and thus return to preparing for conventional combat, as the Army did after the Vietnam War.

The world has moved entirely away from orthodox or conventional warfare because the Global Positioning System or GPS permits weapons to be guided with complete accuracy to any point on earth. This has ended the possibility of concentrating military forces, because massed troops and weapons become targets that can be destroyed from afar. It has also eliminated traditional battlefields, because soldiers no longer can survive on them. GPS-delivered weapons have forced a profound movement to the other extreme of indirect warfare conducted by small, clandestine forces that avoid the enemy’s main strength and aim at weakly defended targets or targets that are not defended at all.

Military forces no longer can be concentrated because they can be located by unmanned surveillance aircraft like the long-range Global Hawk and

the shorter-range Predator, and they can be destroyed by bombs or missiles dropped directly by GPS.

Inerrant weapons have obligated all military elements to disperse widely over the landscape. Dispersion has eliminated the Main Line of Resistance or MLR that was the central element of conventional warfare in the twentieth century. Although the Germans destroyed the Allies' MLR in the West in 1940, the continuous front reappeared in later campaigns when German armored power declined, and also defined the later stages of the Korean War. If armies were lined up along an MLR today, they could be destroyed by missiles launched from over the horizon.

Large armies no longer are possible, and conventional offensives along discernible paths—such as the spectacular drive across France by General George Patton's U.S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in 1944—can no longer be carried out. If any army today should attempt a movement on the order of Patton's, its spearheads could be destroyed almost as soon as they formed, and the offensive would collapse almost as soon as it began.

The absence of a defended front line has the added effect that all military elements can move at will in *any* direction. Military forces no longer have any front or rear, and they can attack any enemy force from any side and can also *be* attacked from any side. Since military forces can move on the ground and in the air, they have almost total fluidity, and they can strike anywhere within an entire theater of war. We see this today in Afghanistan, where the Taliban

and al Qaeda insurgents are able to conduct strikes all over the country, while at the same time American and NATO forces can pick and choose wherever they wish to hit the enemy.

This new pattern applies not only to conflicts in weak, non-nuclear countries, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it also emphasizes a fact that became clear in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. This crisis showed that nuclear powers cannot challenge each other directly, even with non-nuclear weapons. Any nuclear-armed nation threatened with destruction by conventional weapons would strike back with nuclear weapons. Faced with the threat of missile strikes from Cuba in 1962, the U.S. was prepared to go all the way to nuclear war with the Soviet Union. To avoid its own nuclear destruction, the Soviet Union backed down and removed its missiles. Because of this mutually assured destruction (MAD), warfare between nuclear-armed powers can never be more extensive than small-scale blows by surrogates to prevent or neutralize some unwanted action. The more direct and conventional that surrogate actions are the more they are likely to fail, however. For example, the effort by Georgia to halt the incursion of Russia into its territory by a direct challenge was stopped quickly by superior Russian military power in 2008.

Military elements today must be extremely small, extremely well-trained, extremely well-armed, and extremely mobile. The army must be subdivided into combat teams of only a couple dozen or so soldiers each. But these small units will be incredibly lethal—not only because the weapons they carry will be

powerful, but also because they can call in the most devastating missiles, rockets, or bombs to be delivered by air onto any target within seconds or minutes. However small these combat teams will be, they will possess the fire power and thus the effective strength of much larger conventional forces.

Warfare in the future will be waged by these small combat teams operating alone, but in coordination with other teams, all connected within a network of computers, radios, and television cameras that will provide instantaneous communications and quick delivery of bombs and missiles onto any target anywhere within a theater of war.

Military formations must be small because outfits larger than forty or fifty soldiers can be located by unmanned aerial vehicles and can be destroyed from afar by GPS-directed weapons. Even individual cannons and tanks can be spotted by Global Hawks, Predators and other surveillance methods. A force today must be so innocuous and so unobtrusive that it attracts no notice until it actually strikes.

Traditional military formations—the armies, corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, and companies of the twentieth century—are obsolete. Massed armies are now targets ripe for destruction, not marks of strength. And, because computer networks provide instant global communication, there is no need for the traditional military hierarchy of command. Since actions can be carried out much faster and over far greater distances than in the past, command decisions can be made quickly. And they often must be made

quickly because targets are normally fleeting. This eliminates the possibility of maintaining traditional military formations and hierarchies.

Conventional warfare for nearly four-hundred years was based on movements of large formations onto battlefields where they confronted the enemy in stand-up conflict. This form of warfare is not possible today. Armies no longer can be maneuvered as large units, and they no longer can be concentrated on a battlefield. If such were to happen, the army could be annihilated by missiles and bombs delivered from afar.

The model for warfare in the future will be indirect strikes. That is, blows will be delivered against undefended targets or targets that are ill-defended. Sending in a strike against a well-emplaced, expectant enemy force is an invitation to disaster—because a defending force, however small, can call in immense defensive weapons, provided it knows that the strike is coming. Successful warfare in the future will require that the enemy *not* know where the blow is coming, or he must be in a position where he cannot defend against it. For example, an enemy may be defending a series of supply depots, bases, and cities. But he cannot defend all cities, bases, and depots. Otherwise his strength would be so dissipated that he would be defending nothing. Therefore, undefended important places will exist, and they will be vulnerable. Warfare must aim at these vulnerable, unsuspecting targets, not focus on alert, well-defended targets.

In other words, an attack should avoid enemy *strength* and strike at enemy *weakness*. This indirect approach is the original form of warfare. The anthropologist Lawrence H. Keeley, in his book *War Before Civilization*, shows that surprise attacks, usually at night, on an unprepared enemy were the most common form of primitive warfare. It was successful because it avoided strength and struck at weakness. Indeed, guerrilla warfare is the *most* successful form of warfare for precisely this reason.

The conventional or primarily direct methods that have characterized warfare since the Thirty Years War (1618-48) are obsolete because armies—faced with being hit from afar by inerrant weapons—must disappear from view. The main characteristic of guerrilla or partisan warfare in the past was that soldiers were unobtrusive or nearly invisible. They did not emerge into view until they actually struck their targets. This must be the pattern of warfare in the foreseeable future. The new kind of warfare will repeat in a new form the old pattern of hidden, indirect, secretive attacks of our ancestors.

In preparing for the new form of war, we must learn the old pattern thoroughly. We have only scattered evidence of indirect warfare from the Stone Age. We have much stronger evidence from historical times. Alexander the Great suffered his only defeats from partisans in central Asia in 329 B.C. The Roman Quintus Fabius Maximus kept his forces scattered in the hills of southern Italy to defeat Hannibal's superior Carthaginian cavalry in 217 B.C. The Scots preserved their independence by following the "testament" of Robert

the Bruce (1274-1329). He recommended that the Scots abandon direct challenges to the English longbows and fight only among hills and morasses, retire to the woods rather than fortify castles, ravage open country in front of the advancing enemy, and confine their attacks to night surprises and ambushes. The Spaniards gave us the modern name for this form of conflict—guerrilla means “small war” in Spanish—when they successfully challenged Napoleon’s armies from 1808 to 1814.

Modern practices of partisan warfare emerged in the American Civil War when John Singleton Mosby hobbled large parts of the Union army by his strikes in northern Virginia in 1863-65. The Boers of South Africa, using guerrilla tactics and employing only 15,000 men, throttled a British army of a quarter of a million men in 1900-02. T.E. Lawrence of Arabia led the Bedouins in a successful guerrilla war against the Turks in 1917-18. Mao Zedong developed highly effective partisan tactics in his war against the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek from 1928 to 1949. The Vietnam Wars 1945-75 were won by partisans against conventional forces.

The U.S. military today is still largely structured to face the conventional armies that existed in the twentieth century. We must return to our oldest and most successful form of conflict. The weapons of war have changed, but the principles of indirect warfare remain the same.